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ABSTRACT

Brock University's (Ontario) Faculty of Education developed and conducted two pilot programs that extended teacher education over 2 academic years. This paper reports the results of a study that followed graduate teachers of the extended preparation program into their first professional year. The study explored participants' perceptions of their confidence and competence to teach as well as their experiences during the first year of professional life. Data from individual interviews (n=16) conducted at mid-year and the end of the year indicated that participants overwhelmingly supported the extended teacher preparation program. None of them identified their most important learning or best experience as coming from the first year of the program. Instead, they were adamant that both their confidence and competence were distinctly higher after the second year. The gains they identified resulted from the time that had been spent in particular ways. The second year had been split equally between a 4-month practicum and returning to the faculty to take additional courses. Students liked the extended course because it allowed them to observe and participate in establishing classroom routines and environments, they were in the school long enough to authentically engage in all aspects of teaching, and they were able to become thoroughly engaged in student learning and observe its development over time. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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Teacher Pre-Service Preparation: Does Twice the Time Make Better Beginning Teachers?

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Teacher Pre-Service Preparation: Does Twice the Time Make Better Beginning Teachers?

The teaching profession requires that its beginning teachers assume the same workload and achieve the same success as those teachers who have many years of experience (Tellez, 1992). Thus first year teachers must not only attend to the myriad of classroom responsibilities but they must also accommodate and participate in the established school culture. The result is that many first year teachers remember their first year as being very difficult and stressful (Huling-Austin, 1992). Keeping this in mind, we will discuss recommendations for pre-service teacher education based on information gleaned from the first professional year of 16 teachers who completed an extended teacher education program. In 1995 the participants volunteered to participate in a two-year pre-service education pilot program at Brock University in Ontario. This pilot program with research support granted by the Ontario Government received its genesis from *The Royal Commission on Learning* released in 1992. The final report of the commission, *For the Love of Learning* (Begin & Caplan, 1994), is very clear about what was learned about teacher education from wide consultation with all stakeholders.

> There is little doubt, however, that a longer pre-service program is necessary. The current period is too brief to provide sufficient opportunity for developing all the skills and knowledge teachers need for teaching in today's schools, let alone those of the future.
>
> Preparation for teaching should be as rigorous as for any other profession. Not only do prospective teachers need to build knowledge and skill, they must develop enough expertise , comfort and understanding of the educational system to move from being students to becoming independent professional teachers. We believe that the consecutive program should be substantially restructured and extended to two years, while the concurrent programs should be similarly extended by one year (Begin & Caplan, 1994, p. 24).

We agree with the intent of the report and contend that pre-service teacher education should be rethought. Driving our belief is the conviction that the future of education rests on the shoulders of good teachers who are well prepared in terms of knowledge, pedagogy and values (Standards of Practice, College of Teachers, 1998). We also agree with many of those involved in teacher education that the current model of an eight month preparatory

program (the predominant model in Ontario) is too short to enable student teachers to develop the kinds of skills they will need to meet the demands of the curriculum as we enter a new millennium (Begin & Caplan, 1994; Covert, Williams & Kennedy, 1991; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995, Upitis, 1997). The tradition of a short "year long" preparation period (in reality an eight-month program) is seen as insufficient both by the public and educators.

At Brock University's Faculty of Education, therefore, in response to the above concerns, we developed and conducted two pilot programs that extended teacher education over a two academic year period.

The Problem Examined

There is general agreement in the educational community that the existing programs for preparing beginning teachers are no longer adequate (Begin & Caplan, 1994; Grimmett, 1998; Sheehan & Fullan, 1995). Such concerns are not limited to North America, as teacher education is also being re-thought in many countries including Australia, England, Portugal and Norway (Alarcao, 1995; Hauge, 1995; Pimm & Selinger, 1995; Tisher, 1995). The changes being contemplated and implemented in many countries are a response to fundamental shifts in stakeholder relationships, structures, curriculum focus and the concept of the role of the teacher. For instance, with the burgeoning of information and its ready availability, the knowledge component of curriculum has been de-emphasized with skill development taking predominance. Generic skills such as knowing how to problem-solve in a variety of curriculum areas as well as "real life" are considered essential learning for students as they enter the new millennium (Wideen, 1995). It is also vital that students learn how to work effectively on collaborative projects and that social and emotional skills be developed (Goleman, 1995)

As the dialogue regarding pre-service teacher education intensifies, it is becoming evident that one of the major problems affecting the reform process in Canada is the lack of any single best model of teacher education (Grimmett, 1998). Although the needs and realities of each Canadian situation may be unique (Grimmett, 1998), there has never been

any concerted effort to create a national design for teacher preparation programs. As a result, reforms are being conducted largely in isolation. In addition, teacher education is often undervalued by its own alumni which perpetuates the myth that "anyone can teach" (Sheehan & Fullan, 1995, p. 91). As a result, many faculties trying to make their teacher preparation more meaningful are "tinkering" with their programs in the context of their various university environments and Ministry guidelines.

In Ontario, as in British Columbia, the occasion of the transfer of teacher certification from the Ministry to a newly-formed College of Teachers is serving as one catalyst for re-thinking teacher education programs. The creation of a program that prepares beginning teachers to teach effectively is one responsibility of teacher educators and one that we believe must be addressed with an eye to the realities of changing professional expectations.

The Pilot Programs Examined

In 1995 at Brock University, faculty developed two distinct pilot programs for extended teacher education programs in response to the Ontario Ministry's of Education and Training call for proposals. One program was housed on the main St. Catharines Campus and one on the satellite Hamilton Campus. These two separate programs operated simultaneously between September 1995 and May 1997 with 12 and 10 students respectively. The students in both programs were unique being motivated to spend an extra year in teacher preparation. Although several had individual reasons for making this choice, the chief reason across both groups was that they saw an opportunity of obtaining a better education and becoming better teachers. Thus, throughout the two years, faculty noted the exceptionally high level of motivation and determination.

Although different in several respects, the pilot programs had similar first years and were developed around the same themes: 1) Preparation should extend over two years, 2) An integration of theory and practice, 3) Student choice for advanced study, 4) An extended practicum in schools over four months beginning in September and continuing

until Christmas during the second year of the program. Also, in addition to the regular program courses, several new courses were created to be taken in the last term of the program i.e. Computers in Education, Social Issues, Assessment and Evaluation as well as several optional courses which were designed to meet the curriculum and pedagogical needs of these new teachers.

An outside researcher funded by the Ministry was hired to study the pilot programs. Data collection methods included group and individual interviews of all participants, interviews of school-based personnel and on-going reflective field notes kept over the two year period. A final report was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Training in June 1997 (Harris, 1997). It documented the quality of the student teachers' learning, the kinds of learning experiences they found beneficial and their sense of professional development. The report identified that over the two year period participants moved from being student teachers to becoming reflective practitioners. We have described the two-year experience in more detail in other forums (Elliott, 1998; Harris, 1997; Harris, Elliott & Dworet, 1998).

In 1997 graduates from the pilot programs accepted a variety of jobs from full-time classroom teaching to supply teaching, to opening a school of dance to working in a group home. Two graduates took full time international teaching jobs in Mexico and England. One graduate took a position with a computer company that designed software and workshops for classroom use. One person chose not to teach at all.

The First Year of Professional Activities

This paper will report the results of a study designed to follow graduate teachers of the extended preparation program into their first professional year. The study was designed to explore participants' perceptions of their confidence and their competence to teach as well as their experiences during the first year of professional life. It is anticipated that the results will be informative for Brock University's Faculty of Education in particular and for teacher education in general.

There are several limitations to the study that must be noted. As discussed, these self-selected group of students were unusually highly motivated and achievement oriented. In the second year of the program the off-campus site changed for one of the groups which was disconcerting and inconvenient for many of them. Finally, the extended practicum differed from the usual practice because students were not placed with a particular teacher but placed in a school. Decisions about classroom teaching were made by the school staff and the principal.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted at the mid-point and at the end of the year. Two separate open-ended interview protocols were created (See Appendix) and mailed to participants prior to the interview so they could reflect on the questions in advance and so the interview could be conducted in an informal manner. Although attempts were made to locate all 22 graduates , only 16 were available for interviews. At least one interview with each participant was conducted in person with the second one being conducted either by phone, e-mail or in some cases in person again. Interviews averaged about an hour in duration. Any additional contact between researchers and participants between interviews was recorded in field notes and added to the data. Those from out of country were interviewed at the end of the year only with questions from the first interview being incorporated into the final protocol. All interviews were taped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

A complete copy of all transcriptions was received by both researchers. Each then conducted an independent analysis using recurrent coding and theme analysis. Researchers then came together and pooled their analyses and further thematic analysis was conducted. Final themes and categories were established and agreed upon. As a member check, each participant was sent a copy of this paper for comment and feedback.

Results

The results are divided into two categories which are not unrelated but will be separated for purposes of reporting results. During the discussion and recommendations section of the paper they will be reconnected and causal relationships will be explored. The two categories are Reflections on an Extended Teacher Education Program and The First Year of Professional Experience. Themes related to Reflection on an Extended Teacher Education Program fall into 5 categories:

1) Sustained Respect for the Extended Program,

2) What Was Missing

3) The Value of the Extended Practicum,

4) Value of Cohort Groups, and

5) The Best Courses.

Themes related to The First Year of Professional Experience fall into 8 categories:

1) Sense of Competence and Confidence,

2) What Was Learned During the First Year,

3) Supply Teaching,

4) Greatest Concern,

5) Greatest Satisfaction,

6) Mentorship Programs,

7) Reflective Practitioner and

8) Teaching in Alternate Settings.

The context for these reflections is very specific. Interviews occurred at the six months point and at the end of the school year during the first year of teaching. They may change over time so these thoughts merely capture the impressions of beginning teachers in the immediacy of their first professional year.

Reflections on an Extended Teacher Preparation Program

1) Sustained Respect for the Extended Program

There appeared to be nearly unanimous agreement, which was sustained over the two interview periods that the extended program was a very beneficial beginning to their careers. This belief was strongly stated both at the mid-point and at the end of the year. With the exception of one individual, all would recommend the program to others.

> I would do it again and I'd recommend it to other people. I just couldn't imagine going into a classroom after one year (Debra).

> I would recommend it because teaching is such a complex process that I really don't think you can learn enough in one year (Beth).

The second year of the extended program was seen as particularly helpful as they moved beyond "skimming the surface" and experienced the culture of schooling first hand.

> In the second year I found that teaching was much more than I idealistically thought. I thought being a teacher was just being in front of your class but it is much more. It is having responsibilities outside the classroom, being involved with colleagues on committees, participating in extracurricular events and parent councils (Jen).

> If I hadn't taken the two year program I don't think I would be as full of ideas or strategies for doing things. Also I would not know as much about routines and discipline strategies (Sandra).

> I think it has been tremendously beneficial having the two year teacher preparation experience. I feel that I was far more confident entering my placement in the fall. I had a feel for the culture of the school over an extended period of time (Sherri).

> I would not only recommend it I would strongly say that without it you are not ready. I've known a lot of other first year teachers and they were really stressed about writing report cards and parent interviews. They were asking me why I was so calm? So I explained the program and they all said that they wished they'd had something like that (Danielle).

Two students qualified their comments suggesting that perhaps the extended program would not be suitable for everyone.

> Yes I would recommend it to others but it would depend upon someone's personality too. There are a lot of people who just want to get their certificate and get out. I would do it again because I think it was a sure bet and I always go for the sure thing.(Stacey).

The individual who would not recommend the program to others found the two years of the extended program too financially demanding. He, however, qualified his statements saying that he believes there is a need for a longer program but suggested that it be "..compressed into ten months with more time in the classroom" (Scott).

2) What Was Missing

Several participants commented that regardless of preparation there were some aspects of teaching that needed to be experienced first-hand.

> I had a lot to learn once I was in there but I don't think that could have been taught to me before I had this opportunity to go about it (Shannon).

Others named specific areas of teaching where they felt they could have been better prepared. Specifically, although they took a required course in Evaluation and Assessment, they still felt unprepared for managing classroom evaluation procedures.

> I wish I had more on assessment and evaluation--I see the value of what was done then (Jenn).

Two students had Kindergarten assignments initially. Although one had taken the junior/intermediate stream, the other felt that the program had not focused as much as on the Kindergarten curriculum as it had on the other primary grades. "So I feel there is a little bit of a gap there (Sherri).

3) Value of Long Practicum

Graduates unanimously declared that the most helpful aspect of the program was the four month practicum that occurred from September to December during the second

year of the program. Here they became part of the school life and contributed to the culture of the school by doing the extra activities such as "...getting onto committees, running cookie sales at recess and doing things after school"(Stacey). "I had no idea really what school culture was like until I spent the four months in one school" (Jen).

> I don't remember school culture issues at all when I was in the first year of the program. The second year when we were there for the extended period of time I got beyond just my lessons, my day to day stuff and my relationship with my associate teacher. I began to see what else is involved in working in a school and having colleagues.

Additionally, they were able to "find the freedom to experiment and try different approaches and strategies" (Sandra).

The fact that they were in the school in September was also very important to them as they were able to see teachers meet their new classes, establish routines and determine student abilities.

> I was nervous, of course, when I got my own first class, but I wasn't nervous about what I was going to do because I had seen it unfold and I had a game plan in mind (Danielle).
>
> When I started in October with my own class, it was almost the same time of year that I had been in the schools last year. It was helpful to be able to have that experience to draw on and to be able to realize that this is where they are and this is where they'll be going by the end of term (Sherri).
>
> I didn't realize what a help being there in September was until I started here in September. Then I had that experience to fall back on. That timing was very important. We were also there long enough to see the transformation in the students (Shannon).

Additionally, participants felt that during the long block they were able to remove the focus from themselves as teacher performers and visitors in the classroom and place it on the students' learning.

> In a three week block, I was basically concerned with doing dynamic lessons, lesson after lesson to get the grades. In the longer block of time, the focus was more on the kids and on their needs and their learning In the three or four weeks, you kill yourself every night to do these bang-up lessons, but in four months you can't do it every night. I realized that I couldn't expect to do this for my career or I would burn out (Danielle).

In both interviews participants repeatedly referred to the long practicum as the most significant component of the block in terms of their preparedness for the first year of teaching.

> My placement in a school for the extended period of time was invaluable and I wouldn't trade it in. It's just made such a difference for me in terms of my confidence as a teacher. If I am going to be a teacher I want to be a good one, and I want to feel prepared and ready for it (Jen).

4) Importance of Cohort Groups

Cohort groups led by two faculty members are central to the teacher education program at Brock meeting regularly to discuss educational issues in both general and specific terms. The faculty members make placements in schools and supervise their group of students. These cohort groups become intimately engaged with each other in a manner that replicates school culture in terms of collegiality, collaboration and professional development. Regular group meetings also provide a forum for student teachers to reflect upon their own ideas and experiences in light of the theory they may be learning in other courses. In the first year of the program the cohort groups met for about 8 hours a week with 6 of those hours being in the school setting. The second year groups met for two hours in the first term (during the practicum) and in one group met informally

at student request in the second term for the same amount of time. The second group did not meet in the final block but several noted that they missed the contact. Several participants said they particularly found such groups to be integral to their professional learning.

> I liked the counseling group because of how we functioned as a group, sharing knowledge and problems. We helped one another and explored issues of importance that we identified. Our feelings about beginning teaching were discussed here and that really was important to me (Sandra).
>
> We did a lot of collaborative assignments and now I find it easy to work collaboratively with another teacher (Sherri).
>
> What was really encouraged [in cohort groups] was the reflective component and that is really invaluable. I think about what I've tried in a certain situation and what has and hasn't worked. I am used to going and talking to other people and asking them for ideas (Shannon).

5) Best Courses

The participants took two kinds of courses: those that were required and those they chose. In the first year of the program no choices were available but in the last term of the two years when they returned to the faculty after the extended practicum several courses choices were made. At that time, they were provided with a group of courses from which they could choose according to interest and need. While individual students had specific reasons for liking particular courses, several patterns emerged from the interviews.

First, those taken by choice "...because they were exactly what I felt I needed" were most widely cited as being particularly useful (Danielle).

> I really liked the independent courses I could select. For one thing, they were not telling you what to think. These are the theories, you've got to internalize all this and meanwhile you don't have anywhere to place that information or ground it against experience. Whereas, in year two we had the opportunity to think about

> things and were able to select our courses and thus go out and collect new knowledge on our own (Shannon).

Second, classroom oriented courses appear to have been most popular. Specifically, Advanced Language, Advanced Mathematics and The Evaluation and Assessment courses were popular choices that were remembered favorably by participants.

> I would say I liked Language and Advanced Language maybe because I didn't see that as being my strength as a student (Sherri)
>
> The Advanced Math really filled a big gap for me. We were able to say 'I don't know this. Can you teach this to me?' It was very personalized. (Danielle).

None of the courses taken by requirement in the first year of the program were identified in this context by the participants.

Reflective courses that occurred during the practicum and during cohort meetings where students came together to talk about their observations, experiences and concerns were also highly regarded a year later.

> For me it would be the reflective course we took on Thursday afternoons where we had an opportunity to look back at what we were happy with or what we were frustrated with and why we were frustrated. That really helped me gauge my thinking (Shannon).
>
> The reflective period in the spring was also beneficial because it helped to coordinate all your thoughts. I think that enabled me to make my philosophy of education what I wanted it to be before going in (Sherri).

Perceptions of First Year Teaching Experiences

1) Sense of Competence and Confidence

Most participants regardless of what they were doing explicitly stated that they believed their sense of competence and their confidence level was higher as a result of the extended program. "I think it got me my job because I am really confident and good at what I do"(Christa).

> As much as I am overwhelmed...I'm more self confident now than I would have been after just one year. Everything I learned was valuable and helpful for this year.(Jenn)
>
> I feel I was far more confident and competent entering my occasional placement in the fall. (Sherri)
>
> I was able to bring other people like parents into the classroom. If I did not have the confidence from that extra year, I think I might have been less sure of myself and lacked the confidence to let parents into the room. (Shannon)
>
> I think the program has enabled me to have more confidence in my own classroom-- just feeling that I know I can cover this material, that I understand it. I also think it enabled me to communicate better with fellow staff members because that extended time in schools enabled us to be part of the staff. I also think it enabled me to communicate more effectively with parents because I am more confident in what I am doing with the class (Sherri).

2) What Was Learned During the First Year

Participants generally identified the first year of experience as one of great learning. Several also pointed out that much of what they learned could not have been learned until they were on the job themselves. Laurie spoke for many when she said, "I learned how to be a real teacher."

Others, however, were more specific and identified characteristics that they had developed over the year. For instance, six of the participants identified flexibility as the most important thing they learned during their first year of teaching. "I think you have to be tremendously flexible. Nowadays you have to wear many different hats during the year." (Sherri) "I thought I was flexible before but I am much more so now" (Jenn). Still others said they believed that they had developed better organizational skills and greater patience.

> I've learned a lot about different types of organization and ways of keeping track of a child's growth. I've learned a lot about my own planning and of planning far

> enough ahead so I'm not scrambling three days before starting a new unit. And once again that is all on-the-job-training (Sandi).

Seven participants identified classroom management as the area where they learned the most. They talked about such things as the importance of being consistent, learning to control their temper, the incredible power of encouragement and reinforcement to motivate children to learn.

> I think I've learned classroom management by just having to do it, by surviving it and by adopting methods that I've used before and changing them to suit my needs now (Stacey).

Several participants discussed the struggle to create a balance between the personal and professional components of their lives. Time management issues were discussed in this context as well.

> The biggest thing I've learned is that although teaching is important to me it cannot be your whole life. Life is very short and you have to establish a solid balance between work and friends and everything (Danielle).
>
> I've learned more skills in time management and I've learned the benefits of long-range planning. I've learned this by doing it and by making mistakes (Laurie).

Three participants commented that they had learned much about instruction. "I feel I now have a good grasp on how to get them to read in grade one" (Shannon).

> I guess I've learned how to accept the fact that I can't teach everything and that it's better to do something well than try to do everything not so well (Jenn).

Another three participants said that they had learned to communicate effectively with parents. "I've learned how difficult it is to write report cards especially when they are extremely anecdotal" (Sandi).

"Another thing I learned was that everything you put into it is worth it in the end (Shannon).

3) <u>Supply Teaching</u>

Seven of the beginning teachers started their careers by supply teaching, although for most it was temporary until they found more permanent positions. Nevertheless they had several comments to make upon supply teaching. Some found it a very difficult way to begin their careers.

> My first day of supply teaching was the worst day of my life and I was prepared! It was only classroom management and survival for myself. It made me think I don't want to be a supply teacher because if it is only being a classroom cop then I don't want to be that. I want a relationship with kids where I can see growth and development and where I can nurture that (Jen).
>
> I think schools need some education on how to welcome supply teachers (Jen).
>
> On the supply list, I've learned how to control a classroom above anything else. I was actually teaching classes sometimes but that was something I didn't get around to very much. They don't treat [supply teachers] the same as [regular] teachers (Scott)

Others suggested that supply teaching taught them many new skills. Sherri said she learned the importance of being natural in the role of supply teacher "...even if you are supply teaching, you must be yourself and teach in your own style."

> Through supply teaching I have learned to deal with students of different ages. You are expected to go into a JK one day and then a grade 6 the next. So I've learned the tricks of the trade, and how to handle classroom management. I've learned mostly by just having to do it (Stacey).
>
> After three months on a long-term occasional I really knew I could do it, that I was being successful (Laurie).

4) Greatest Concern

The participants had a great variety of concerns about their first year of experience. Some concerns were related to the areas of competence in their own teaching that they still

wanted or needed to develop to a higher degree. "...trying to get them to listen when their attention span is 5 minutes and I have a 20 minute lesson" (Jenn).

> I am concerned that all my children are where they should be by the end of the year and that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I wanted to get some of the children much further. I get frustrated because there is so much to do. Sometimes if parents didn't respond I just want to bang my head against a wall--especially when I'm trying so hard" (Sandra).

One participant suggested she found it frustrating to realize that it will be some time before she will be where she wants to be as a teacher.

Other comments clustered around the culture of school. Two others cited the lack of in-school support for beginning teachers as very frustrating and isolating. Two participants felt they had been taken advantage of because they were new teachers. One beginning teacher was asked to type the report cards of three staff members because she was so "computer literate." Another was given a federation leadership role in the year of a teachers' strike.

Unfortunately these beginning teachers were faced with participating in a teachers' strike during their first term of teaching. Four participants said they found the strike and the politics surrounding that action to be the least satisfying component of the year. They agree that nothing could have prepared them for such a contingency.

> I found the politics overwhelming at times. I have no other word for it than frustration and I found it exhausting. If I could just exist in my classroom it would be great. But I can't go back and just live in my room because there are things that I know that exist beyond that and I have to do something about them but at the same time, that's where my frustration come from (Shannon)

Writing the kind of report cards which reported effectively to parents emerged as painful and concerning for several others.

> The most painful part of my first term was writing report cards. I haven't come across much that was missing from my pre-service preparation but I would say that was the big thing (Sherri)
>
> When there are children who are not being promoted because they were so weak-- everyone keeps saying that by the time I got them it was too late-- but still, it doesn't make me feel any better. (Stacey)

Finally, by the June interview, most participants identified the end of the year as being most difficult. First, they were leaving their first group of children after becoming attached to them. Second, they found the final report writing, preparations for the following year and trying to keep students focused to the end challenging. "The hardest part about being a teacher is leaving and letting them go." (Jen). Sandra, however, summarized the feelings of many by saying, " I'm kind of sad it's coming to an end but I find I am very tired."

5) <u>Greatest Satisfaction</u>

Over half of those interviewed stated that they gained most satisfaction from watching children grow and develop. "...when the light bulb turned on" (Danielle). "It was exciting just seeing my kids learn, develop and change" (Sherri).

> Kids make such leaps and bounds in grade 1 and by the end of the year they were doing great things. The greatest satisfaction was seeing where they were at the end compared to where they were in January. All of them were reading and it was just great to see that." (Debra).

The move from being a dependent student teacher to being an independent professional teacher was very satisfying for most of the participants. "It was great to have independence without somebody watching every move I made--that was wonderful" (Sandi). Several participants coupled these comments with the satisfaction of finally being paid and getting their debts under control. "Just to get my financial situation under control was nice" (Beth).

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Several others said they gained most satisfaction from their relationships with the children in their classes. "The high point is the children and our relationship. I love them" (Sandra).

Two participants stated their greatest satisfaction came from their relationship with and support from parents of the children in their classes.

> I needed to gain my parents support because at first they thought I was so young. This is my first year and this is their child's first year in school so they were concerned. So I had to win them over and I did so successfully. (Sandra).

6) Mentorship Programs

Beginning teachers generally had very little mentoring support that was supplied from the board. Only one participant had a mentor formally assigned, although she identified that this was not a particularly successful relationship.

> No. We had a 2 day workshop at the end of August and we were given two great thick binders full of curriculum and board expectations and guidelines. There is not an official mentorship program--it's all self selected"(Jenn).

Any mentoring they received was generally from their own initiative.

Several of the group identified their former associate teachers as mentors.

> She is excellent and is always saving stuff for me. She really has a vested interest in me and she wants to see me continue to grow professionally and believes that she can help me. I appreciate her for that (Jen).

On a more positive note, ten participants suggested that they found support from their staff or from the team to which they were assigned on the staff.

7) Reflective Practitioner

When asked if they felt they were indeed reflective practitioners as stated in the final report to the Ministry (Harris, 1997), all but one participant replied in the affirmative. "It's important to look at where you've been and where you're going otherwise you just get stuck" (Sherri).

> I am always thinking how can I do this better? What didn't go so well? How can we do this differently? I can't stop thinking about this job (Debra).
>
> I'm definitely very reflective about everything I do and hope that never changes. And I do believe that is the result of being in the two year program. We had to become reflective because that was part of the expectation The dialogues in our classes was significant for me and I think it is necessary. It's helped me be a better teacher now. (Laurie).

The participant who denied being reflective about her practice said she was generally too tired to think by the end of the day!

8) Teaching in Alternate Settings

Altogether 22 students began the extended teacher programs in 1995. At the end of the first year of experience three years later, 5 of the original group were not in the classroom, either as full time teachers or supply teachers. Another of the participants started a dance school where she is using her teaching skills to enhance her business and her talent. Another is working for a computer company that specializes in classroom software. Still another graduate decided to work in social services in a group home. Finally, one participant decided to return to school to seek another degree believing that it is unlikely that she will ever desire to pursue a teaching career. It is interesting to note that all these decisions were made without an expression of regret for the time spent in an extended teacher preparation program.

Discussion

Although participants had invested an additional year in their preparation and no doubt needed to affirm that decision, the most dominant result of the study was their overwhelming support for an extended teacher preparation program. Interestingly, none of the participants identified their most important learning or best experience as coming from the first year of the program. Instead, they were adamant that both their confidence and competence were distinctly higher after the second year as compared to the end of the first

year. The gains they identified, though, were not merely a result of extra preparation time but that the time had been spent in particular ways. The second year had been split equally between a four month practicum and returning to the faculty to take additional courses. Students were able to choose courses from a large group of offerings and many of the courses were conducted as independent studies.

The long practicum was praised for several reasons. First, at the beginning of the school year, they were able to observe and participate in the establishing of classroom routines and the development of the learning environment. Second, they were in the school long enough to abandon the "pleasing guest" syndrome and to authentically engage in all aspects of teaching. Over a four month period they participated fully in the culture of the school both in and out of the classroom. Third, they were able to become thoroughly engaged in student learning and observe its development over time. These student teachers remain convinced that the long practicum was an excellent preparation for beginning to teach. In fact, this period of time was more like an internship than student teaching and many strong professional relationships were developed.

In the last term some control over their professional learning was provided for the student teachers. The opportunity to select their own courses for additional study and the independent nature of most courses laid the foundation for on-going professional growth. We contend that this was the beginning of professional development because students had control over the decisions related to improving their practice. We agree with Kagan (1992) that professional growth requires changes over time in an individual's behaviour, knowledge, images and perceptions. In a one year program, however, so much basic theoretical and practical information is learned in a short time that it is very difficult to provide students with individual choices. In this extended program, there was room for choice so students could expand their knowledge and horizons in education based on their recent school experiences in ways that held purpose and meaning. Many students chose to study further in core curriculum areas such Language and Mathematics while others

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chose such areas as Family Literacy and Teaching in the Inner City. The freedom to make professional choices was well received by students and seems appropriate for entering a profession where they will be expected to make such decisions regularly. We wonder how well-prepared beginning teachers are for this expectation as they emerge from a program where all courses and learning has been prescribed. The choices provided in this program seemed to fill the gap between the dependency of the student teacher and the independent competency expected of beginning teachers. We believe that the opportunity to make course selections for professional study was an important factor in providing them with their sense of competence and confidence.

The extended program was enhanced by the inclusion of a course, entitled Reflection-on-Practice, which was conducted on Thursday afternoons during the long practicum. At that time, students came together to share opinions and insights about a myriad of educational issues that emerged from their practice. It is interesting to note that almost all of the beginning teachers identified that they were indeed reflective practitioners at the end of their first year. Although reflection is not easy for all people, it seems that if the practice is encouraged it can provide a vehicle for taking responsibility for learning from one's own experience independently.

We know that beginning teachers who do not have a good image of themselves as teachers are more likely to imitate others and may flounder (Kagan, 1992). According to Elliott and Abbey, (1997) there is a tendency by teachers to attempt to survive their first year of teaching by discounting their own questions and turning to quick, ready-made solutions for classroom problems. Indeed, they often do not know what or who to ask when problems arise being constrained by the awareness that they are expected to be as competent as other more experienced teachers Tellez, 1992). Many beginning teachers, therefore, benefit from having a strong mentorship relationship (Elliott & Abbey, 1997; Kagan; 1992).

During their first year of teaching, only one of these beginning teachers was part of a organized mentoring program. Although the term mentor comes from the Greek idea of dependency upon another's wisdom, we prefer the definition by Field and Field (1994) which suggests that mentoring is a process which occurs within a dynamic relationship in a given milieu. This definition suggests that the mentoring process is a relationship from which both parties benefit as the result of their mutual inquiry. Currently, unlike many other professions, it seems that there is little responsibility assumed by most school boards for mentors to guide the transitory process of beginning to teach (Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Knowles, 1991). It is well documented that beginning a teaching career is very demanding (Bullough, 1989; Huling-Austin, 1992), therefore, it is the emotional support that is highly valued in most mentoring relationships (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Given the personal nature of mentoring, it is not surprising that assigned mentors can often be incompatible and that self-selected mentoring relationships are often more successful.

Although they may not be part of a formal mentoring program, many beginning teachers choose their own mentors. In the case of the participants of this study, many stayed in contact in a mentor-like relationship with an experienced teacher they had met during the long practicum. Those who could identify a mentor declared that the relationship was most helpful as they began their careers.

Recommendations

In light of the results of this study we have some general recommendations for pre-service teacher education. We advocate the lengthening of teacher preparation programs from the eight month model which occurs in many institutions. We believe that the skills necessary to be an effective teacher cannot be effectively attained in a traditional university academic year. Such an eventuality means that Faculties of Education would have to by-pass the embedded practices and the institutional constraints created by their presence in the university system. The university is only one of the stakeholders in teacher education and should not be able to impose arbitrary deadlines and graduation dates that drive a program.

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We also recommend that pre-service student teachers spend at least 6 weeks or more in one placement during their preparation time. The benefit would be having sufficient time to observe the effects of their teaching on student learning and experiencing the numerous relationships and duties outside the classroom the constitute the culture of a school. Additionally, we believe that a practicum is most beneficial when it is at the beginning of the year. In such cases student teachers might serve more as participant observers who can see how experienced teachers orchestrate the start of a school year. Too often beginning teachers graduate with an solid idea of the classroom they would like to create but with little idea of how to "get there from here". We recommend, therefore, that efforts be made to place students in schools during September so they can observe and participate in the beginning of the school year.

The preparation of teachers to enter the education profession should involve more than classroom pedagogy and management strategies. While these are undeniably essential building blocks, a beginning teacher also needs to understand the role of reflection in learning from experience and to develop an orientation to life-long learning. Teachers entering the new century must continue their professional learning or they will be outdated very quickly both in terms of curriculum content and technological advances. Thus, it is imperative for Faculties of Education to reconceptualize their programs to ensure that there is enough time and space for reflection-on-beginning-practice and that a model of reflection is provided for students. Additionally, life long learning must be presented as a central assumption for teachers. This means, in effect, that faculty members must model new learning while encouraging their students to demonstrate the same. This assumption can be established in part through the use of dynamic professional portfolios which are begun in the pre-service year. Another way to ensure this orientation is to create a program which includes some student choice where they determine their professional needs and make course selections to enhance those needs. We recommend, therefore, that students have an opportunity at some time in the program, preferably after they have had an extended

practicum, to select areas for specific study related to their strengths and weaknesses and that this be seen as the beginning of taking ownership over professional development.

We recognize that some graduates from pre-service programs choose to apply their teaching skills in work settings other than schools. It might, therefore, be advantageous for student teachers to have the option to be placed in an alternate work site as part of their training. Certainly, a longer program, as recommended above, would leave room for such creative endeavours.

Undeniably it is helpful for beginning teachers to have a more experienced teacher as a mentor. While some beginning teachers take the initiative to select their own mentor, we believe that the onus for mentoring should lie in large part with experienced teachers who can appreciate the anxiety associated with beginning a teaching career. There may be a role for Faculty of Education members to offer guidelines and instruction in the mentoring relationship to both pre-service students and experienced teachers. Such guidelines might include strategies for classroom observation and peer coaching. It would also be useful if schools could provide flexible enough scheduling so that mentors and mentees could observe each other's classrooms and talk to each other during school hours (Colbert & Wolff, 1992).

Finally, we agree with Wideen (1995) who says that if the changes in teacher education are to be authentic, we must do more than the mere tinkering of the past, rather there must be restructuring and reconceptualization of what teacher education entails at the faculty level. We need to consult and maintain relationships with the major stakeholders in teacher education: parents, students, school boards, universities, the Teacher Federations, the newly-formed Colleges of Teachers and the related governmental ministries. This is clearly a large task but nevertheless one which has begun and which needs to be pursued if Faculties of Education are to respond meaningfully to the challenges facing us. According to Sheehan and Fullan (1995), teacher education in Canada is "largely seen as an irrelevant or hopeless player in education reform" (p. 89). We absolutely disagree and are optimistic

that teacher education can be improved. Faculties of Education are already confronting the kinds of changes that will help beginning teachers embark on their professional careers with confidence, competence and a vision of the future.

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